

Editorial: What we think: Slow the revolving door

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Railing against the Republicans' "culture of corruption," Democrats took control of Congress in the 2006 elections. In their first year in charge, they made some overdue improvements to congressional-ethics rules. But in the House, members balked at extending the time they must wait after leaving their seats to lobby their ex-colleagues.

Now first-term Democrat Suzanne Kosmas of New Smyrna Beach has launched a new bid to double the one-year waiting period. Her commendable effort deserves enthusiastic support from both parties, which still have plenty to prove when it comes to their sincerity about ethics reform.

Ms. Kosmas already has lined up the backing of at least one Republican: fellow freshman Bill Posey of Rockledge. This kind of bipartisanship is a welcome about-face for Mr. Posey, who introduced tin-hat legislation in March that would require all presidential candidates to submit a birth certificate when qualifying to run. That proposal was red meat for the fringe members of his party who still refuse to accept that Barack Obama is a U.S. citizen and eligible to be president.

Democrats and Republicans in the House have good reason to unite behind an effort to slow the revolving door between Capitol Hill and K Street. It turns lawmakers into high-priced lobbyists, often for the same interests that had business before them in Congress.

Former Rep. Bob Livingston, a Louisiana Republican, was chased out of Congress in 1999 by allegations of extramarital affairs. He opened a lobbying firm that pulled in \$4.8 million the year after his waiting period expired.

Members who make this switch erode public confidence in government. They raise suspicions that members are writing legislation with lucrative lobbying positions in mind. And when they capitalize on their personal ties to gain greater access and influence with their ex-colleagues, they reinforce the popular perception of lawmaking as a game for insiders.

With these hazards in mind, reform-minded members of Congress in 2007 tried to double the waiting period for ex-lawmakers to become lobbyists from one to two years. They succeeded in the Senate, but failed in the House.

Some House members who had the nerve to publicly admit their opposition actually argued that the longer cooling-off period would hinder their ability to earn a living. Don't you just ache for them?

It is to the credit of Ms. Kosmas, and the embarrassment of House Democratic leaders, that a first-term member of the party is taking the lead on resurrecting this reform. Of course, ethics happens to be a politically smart issue for Ms. Kosmas. She won her seat in the House by defeating three-term Republican Tom Feeney of Oviedo, who couldn't overcome the damage done by revelations that he had gone on a golf junket with corrupt lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

Even if the House approves the proposal from Ms. Kosmas, lobbying rules for both chambers could stand more

tightening. It is still possible for ex-lawmakers to go to work right away for a firm that seeks to influence policy-making as long as they don't personally lobby their ex-colleagues. They are free to advise clients on dealing with Congress, direct other lobbyists, or lobby state governments themselves.

In April, USA Today reported that 17 of 62 lawmakers who left Congress last year, including Mr. Feeney and former GOP Rep. Ric Keller of Orlando, already had taken jobs in government relations with firms that lobby on public policy.

Despite its limits, Ms. Kosmas' proposal would help curb the corrupting temptation for House members to convert their experience into a commodity for sale to the highest bidder. Her colleagues shouldn't squander this second shot at reform.